

REVIEWS

Druce's List of British Plants*

The appearance of this little octavo of 204 pages, containing the names of 734 genera and 2,958 species, besides a very large number of varieties, may be regarded as an important event in the history of English botany. However inconvenient its pursuit by one's self or by others, nomenclature is a department of botany that is of fundamental importance. As a very general rule, those botanists who are indifferent to it are not numbered among either the more careful or the better informed, a fact which, in the nature of the case, could not be otherwise. The study of botany, native and foreign, in England, has suffered through the neglect of this subject, a neglect which has been to a great extent forced upon many who disapprove of it, by the exigencies of official requirement. Oxford is one of the places where such repressive influence is least felt, and it is but natural that the rational revision of British plant names should have been there undertaken. The attitude of Mr. Druce toward this subject was made very clear when he successfully contended for the starting point in priority that has since been almost universally accepted. Pharmaceutical botany felt his influence when he recognized the doctrine of priority, and rejoiced that the principles of Bentley and Trimen were to be by him maintained. His opinions are illustrated by the following extract from the preface to the "List":

"The oldest generic and specific name is chosen where possible, the starting-point being the first edition of the *Species Plantarum* of 1753, a date and work first suggested by the compiler in a paper on nomenclature (*Pharmaceutical Journal*, p. 789, 1892). At that time, the date of the first edition of the *Genera Plantarum*, 1737, was adopted by the committee which framed the Paris 'Leges' as the starting-point of generic citation, and it was only after some considerable correspondence that the writer

*List of British plants, containing the Spermophytes, Pteridophytes and Charads found either as natives or growing in a wild state in Britain, Ireland, or the Channel Isles. By George Claridge Druce, M.A., F.L.S., Secretary of the Botanical Exchange Club and Fielding Curator in the University of Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1908.

induced M. Alphonse de Candolle to support his view that generic and specific citation should both date from 1753. Independently, Professor Ascherson and other Berlin botanists pressed for the same object, and that date is now generally accepted, and was adopted in one of the 'Actes' passed at the Vienna Congress of 1905.

"But at that Congress, unfortunately, several genera were made into a favoured list of 'Nomina Conservanda,' despite the fact that others, avowedly of a prior date, existed. Space does not allow the matter to be laboured here, but it must be said that this list is either unnecessary or insufficient; for instance, the well-defined and definite genus *Mariana* Hill is put among the names which are to be rejected, while *Radicula* Hill (a faulty name, and a badly defined genus, excluding as it does the Water-Cress, which may be looked on as the type of the genus, and including the yellow-flowered species only) may be used. This and other inconsistencies must in the long-run outrage the sense of justice, which after all is a key-note of botanical as well as human laws. Therefore the 'Nomina Conservanda' of the Vienna Congress are here deliberately ignored when other generic names which appear to be properly diagnosed have priority. An important section of Transatlantic botanists take the same course, and in the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club*, April, 1907* (which appeared after this *List* was prepared), state that 'they regard [the exclusion of several hundred generic names of plants from the operation of all nomenclatorial rules] as in the highest degree arbitrary, as controverting a cardinal principle.' This is not only common sense, but practical and just. A plan which accepts *Phyllitis* Hill and conserves *Silybum* Gaertn., 1791, in preference to *Mariana* Hill, 1762, or which retains an inchoate pseudo-homonymous genus like *Epipactis* of Adanson or Crantz, or the faulty *Gloriosa* L., but rejects *Capnoides* Adans., which was founded by Tournefort, and the identity of which is undoubted, fails to inspire confidence, and certainly does not commend itself on the ground either of justice or consistency. In many cases there must be diversity of opinion, and exception may quite fairly be taken to some of the names here employed, but an endeavour has been made to carry out consistently the principles of priority."

By ignoring the foolish and crude list, forced by the Berlin

*The canons framed by the botanists at the meeting in Philadelphia in March, 1904, which are reprinted in the *Bulletin*, l. c., have much to commend them for their practical common sense.

botanists upon the Vienna Congress, and standing out for priority, Mr. Druce's results come very close to those reached by adhering to the theory of types, to which theory we again invite attention, believing that a position must be reached in which genera will stand or fall with their type species. If no type was assigned by the author of the genus, one must be assigned by some combination of considerations. For North American genera, types are rapidly being established by one author or another, and it is to be hoped that European genera will also become fixed by this method. Descriptions of genera without any species assigned them will not stand against genera with designated types.

A system which retains *Posoqueria* Aublet, 1775, but rejects *Icacorea* Aublet, 1775, both published as monotypic in the same work, and which retains *Piscidia* L., 1759, while rejecting *Ichthyomethia* P. Browne, 1756, both based on the same type, is bound by its very absurdity to fail. We think that the Berlin botanists, by proposing this highly arbitrary means of attempting to steady the use of generic names, failed to take advantage of a great opportunity, which they were not ingenious enough to see.

The manner in which Mr. Druce has performed the present piece of work is highly creditable. By a carefully elaborated system of symbols and typography, his list tells us whether a given plant is native or doubtfully so, whether of fugitive or occasional occurrence, or established, if it has become extinct, if found only in the country cited, and other facts regarding distribution, if a probable hybrid, and if so, which is its dominant parent. The author states that during thirty years' collecting, he has seen all but fifty of the plants listed growing *in situ*. Synonyms are given only when this is necessary for some special reason. Specific names are capitalized when of previous generic significance, when personal or when terminating in *oides*, "this being evidently the intention of Linnaeus." The ending *aceae* is retained for family names. Since the list is to be used largely as a check-list, for exchange purposes, all specific names are consecutively numbered. The parenthetical citation of authors is employed in cases of generic and varietal, but not for specific names.

The author's strong — we think too strong — tendency to unite genera is indicated in his inclusion of both *Pulsatilla* and *Hepatica* in *Anemone*, and *Batrachium* in *Ranunculus*.

Mr. Druce's list, by excluding, in deference to the Vienna Rules, duplicate binomials, fails to record important nomenclatorial facts, just as it does in omitting parenthetical citations of authors of specific names. In the latter case, indeed, the omission actually involves misstatement. That such loss, if noted, is accepted by the author out of sheer dislike for unfamiliar mechanical form would seem to be indicated by his treatment of other names which, for every reason except such form, have less to commend them than the double names referred to.

He admits the name *Cerastium cerastioides* Britton, an inane binomial, made necessary by the priority of the specific name of the plant described by Linnaeus as *Stellaria cerastioides*. We do not understand why, as he accepts this meaningless name, he should decline to accept names like *Mariana Mariana* Hill, or *Coronopus Coronopus* Karsten, which are not meaningless; but very significant, indicating as they do, that *Carduus Mariana* L. is the type species of *Mariana* and that *Lepidium Coronopus* L. is the type species of *Coronopus*. These duplicate names were rejected at Vienna by a close vote, taken after Professor Engler had made the naïve complaint that some of his students laughed at them! There is plenty of good precedent for their retention, both botanical and zoölogical.

The list prepared by Mr. Druce will be of great value, not alone to the members of the British local clubs and societies to whose membership it is primarily addressed, but to students in America and in Continental Europe. In Great Britain it cannot fail to mold opinion and to fix the usage of many plant names for a long period. Emanating as it does from Oxford University, it is assured a distinguished and independent audience; we congratulate Mr. Druce on its appearance!

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